

A

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION.

Saturday September 15. 1711.

A BUSES in Trade never encrease so much, as when Trade declines — Men in Business driven to innumerable Shifts and Subterfuges, to support their Affairs, invade Right, encroach upon Justice, and dishonour Themselves. Again, They undermine one another, Combine and Confederate against one another; enter into Engrossments, Monopolies, Combinations, &c. And, in short, they seem to make War upon Trade itself; and one Observation I have made in this Case, which I believe seldom fails; these Encroachments upon Trade, Combinations, and Engrossings,

generally end in Bankruptcy; the Reason is evident, thriving Men are generally fair Dealers; I allow it to be true, that they thrive, because they are fair Dealers; but much more is it true, they are fair Dealers because they Thrive.

The World has a very unhappy Notion of Honesty, which they take up to the Prejudice of the Unhappy — Such a Man is a fair Merchant, a punctual Dealer, an honest Man, and a rich Man — Ay, says one, that makes him a rich Man. God blesses him because he is an Honest Man — It's a mistake, God's blessing is the Effect of no Man's Merit — God's blessing may have made

made him a rich Man — But why is he an honest Man, a fair Dealer, a punctual Merchant? The Answer is plain, Because he is a rich Man — The Man's Circumstances are easie, his Trade answers, his Cash flows, and his Stock Increases; this Man cannot be otherwise than Honest, he has no occasion to be a Knavery — Cheating in such a Man ought to be Felony, and that without the Benefit of Clergy — He has no Temptation, no wretched Necessity of Shifting and Tricking, which another Man flies to, to deliver himself from Ruin — The Man is not Rich, because he is Honest, but he is Honest because he is Rich.

Look to the foolish and injurious Notions of the Age; Men are Knaves that break, and no doubt many Knaves do break — But give me leave to say, Men are made Knaves by breaking; a certain Draper not far from his Neighbours, had it always in his Mouth, such a Man was a Rogue, such a Villain, such a Cheat — Why, Sir, says one? — Why, he can't pay his Debts — If he had ta't won't pay his Debts, I had join'd with him; but to prevent my asking after his Abilities, he always added, every Man was a Rogue that was a Bankrupt, and in 6 Months, I found his Father's Name in the Gazette; this made him a little Moderate, and now he finds as much difficulty to keep his own out, as any Man in the Street has done this seven Year — Blessed be God, Honesty of Principle may remain under deep Disasters, all the Knaves are not yet broke, some stand behind their Counters still, and walk the Change still, who deserve more the Gallows, than the miserable that shelter under the Fury of Creditors; and are only Honest now, because they are not under the Necessity of being otherwise.

And pray, Gentlemen, do not vouch too fast for your own Honesty; you that have not been try'd with Distresses and Disasters, ye know not what you are your selves — Many a Man that thinks himself as Honest as Neighbours, will find himself as

great a Rogue as any of them all, when he comes to the push.

How many honest Gentlemen have we in England of good Estates and noble Circumstances, that would be Highway-Men, and come to the Gallows, if they were poor? How many rich, current, punctual, fair Merchants now walk the Exchange, that would be errant Knaves if they came to be Bankrupt? Poverty makes Thieves, as bare Walls makes giddy Housewives; Distress makes Knaves of honest Men, and the Exigencies of Tradesmen, when in declining Circumstances, of which none can judge, and which none can express but those that have felt them, will make honest Men do that, which at another time their very Souls abhor — I own to speak this with sad Experience, and am not a man to confess myself a Penitent — And let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Let the honestest Man in this Town tell me when he is sinking, when he sees his Family's Destruction in such an Arrest, or such a Seizure, and has his Friends Money by him, or has his Employers Effects in his Hand; Can he refrain making use of it? — Can he forbear any more than a Starving Man will forbear his Neighbours Loaf? Will the honestest Man of you all, if ye were drowning in the Thames, refuse to lay hold of your Neighbour who is in the same Condition, for fear he drown with you? Nay, will you not pull him down by the Hair of his Head, tread on him with your Feet, tho' you link him to the Bottom, to get your self out? — What shall we say? — Give me not Poverty, lest I Steal, says the Wiseman that is, if I am poor I shall be a Thief; I tell you all, Gentlemen, in your Poverty, the best of you all will rob your Neighbour; nay, to go farther, as I said once on the like Occasion, you will not only rob your Neighbour, but if in distress, you will eat your Neighbour, ay, and say Grace to your Meat too — Distress removes from the Soul, all Relation, Affection, Sense of Justice, and all the Obligations, either Moral or Religious, that secure one Man against another.

Not

Not that I say or suggest the Distress makes the Violence Lawful ; but I say it is a Tryal beyond the Ordinary Power of Humane Nature to withstand ; and therefore that Excellent Petition of the Lord's Prayer, which I believe is most wanted, and the least thought of, ought to be every Moment in our Thoughts, *Lead us not into Temptation.*

But to return to my first Observation ; I am of the Opinion, That the Honour of Trade in this Nation, is the most declin'd in this Age, of any Thing, *Religion excepted*, that can be observ'd — I believe I need not beg the Question, it will be easily granted —

Tricking, Sharping, Shuffling, and all manner of Chicane, is crept into our Commerce, more than ever was known.

I have hinted above, that it is an evident signal of the decay of Trade — And the Reason is, that a decay of Trade is naturally the great Original and Parent of these Follies, which if Men were Thriving, and their Affairs easie, they would avoid : Men rob for Bread, Women whore for Bread; Necessity is the Parent of Crime ; Ask the worst High-Way Man in the Nation, ask the lewdest Strumpet in the Town, If they would not willingly leave off the Trade, if they could live handsomly without it — And I dare say, not one but will acknowledge it.

I cannot indeed but own, that I think that Modern Mischief call'd Stock-Jobbing, Wagering, Ensuring, and those Excessencies of Trade, have introduc'd a kind of new Temper among our Traders ; they have something of a differing Way, Jealous of one another, looking sharp about them, taking all Men to be Thieves, and a strange je ne sais quoi, Catching, Circumventing, and the like, more than ever was known before.

Men talk now in Trade, as Spaniards walk, with their Hands upon their Swords ; Brother guards against Brother, and Father against Son ; as if so many Tradesmen, so many Pickpockets ; or so many Merchants, so many Thieves — I can boldly tell you, tho' I am no Ancient Man neither,

That I have known the Time when it was not so — And that Honour of Trade, which I remember in this City, I really know not where now to find it — I do not say, it is quite lost, but I must say it is not so visible as it was 30 Year ago — Nor is the Trade carried on with such Success now, as it was in those Days.

And what's the Consequence ? As there was less Sharping and Tricking in Trade, so was there not so much Breaking and Sinking of Tradesmen ; Ten *Gazette's* should come out together, and not one Commission of Bankrupt in them : But, as before, Breaking generally follows foul Trading, and so it is now.

I might give you many Instances of this, but I forbear, because it may touch particular Men, and especially such Men who are just now in the Mire, and I scorn to heap Loads upon the Afflicted, be their Cases ever so Worthy of Reproach.

But what if I should Instance a Case now become Popular, between two *Portugal* Merchants and the Vintners — If it be true as is alledg'd in publick — 1. That the Vintners Combin'd not to buy their Wines, unless they could run down the Prices. 2. That afterwards pretending to buy, in order to amuse the said Merchants, and really buying their Wines, and thereupon only putting the Merchants off from their Designs of Retailing, and when they had carried that Point as far as they could, refus'd to take away the Wines they had bought ; if this be true, a Man may rather pity their Folly, than justify their Knavery.

Qui sharpat sharpatissim. If it is not good Latin, it is good Sense ; And what now is the Consequence to the Vinters ? Or rather, what, in all probability, will be the Consequence to them in one half Year ? This Adventure having sunk the whole Stock of Wine in their Hands, one sixth part in Value ; so that he, whose Cellar of Wines was worth 1800 Pounds, loses actually 300*l.* out of his Pocket — Let Time shew us the Event.

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